All India Sarpanch Conference

*316. SHRI SHARAD YADAV: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) the number of panchayat people being invited in the All India Sarpanch Conference;

(b) the arrangement being made for their travel and stay in Delhi and expenses thereon; and

(c) whether it is necessary to make such a huge 'function' for Gram Panchayats, when it is a State subject?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) Government have taken no decision on holding an "All India Sarpanch Conference".

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

Agreement with Gulf countries

*317. SHRIMATI HEMA MALINI: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government has decided to sign agreements with Gulf countries in order to protect Indian workers there; and

(b) the salient features of the agreements and by when these are expected to be implemented?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) and (b) To facilitate the mobilization and requirement of manpower in the Gulf countries and to ensure the protection and welfare of overseas Indian workers the Government of India has signed bilateral Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with the Government of Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and an Additional Protocol to the Agreement between the State of Qatar and the Republic of India on the Regulation of the Employment of Indian Manpower signed in 1985.

The salient features of the MoUs signed with the UAE in December, 2006 are the following:

(i) Facilitation of manpower recruitment and mutual sharing of information and experience;

(ii) Recruitment to be in conformity with the laws of both countries;

(iii) All categories of workers to have the protection of the UAE labour law and regulation;

(iv) Terms and conditions of employment contract to be in conformity with the work permit that the employer has obtained from the UAE Government.

(v) All contracts to be authenticated by the UAE Labour Ministry;

(vi) The employer would have no authority to change the contract conditions;

(vii) A Joint Committee consisting of three members each from both countries to be responsible for the implementation of the MoU.

The salient features of the MoU signed with the State of Kuwait in April, 2007 are the following:

(i) Facilitation of the recruitment of manpower between the two countries;

(ii) Prohibition on changing the terms and conditions of the contract of employment to the detriment of the workers;

(iii) Procedure for authentication of the employment contract;

(iv) Unequivocal responsiblity on the employer regarding arranging work permit for the worker;

(v) Protection and welfare of the workers not covered under the labour law of the State of Kuwait;

(vi) Constitution of a Joint Working Group.

The salient features of the Additional Protocol signed in November, 2007 with the State of Qatar are the following:

(i) It enlarges the mandate of the Joint Committee and provides for a wide range of issues that can be reviewed by the Joint Committee for promotion of emigration from India to Qatar and protection/welfare of Indian workers;

(ii) It stipulates that the Joint Committee would meet twice a year alternately;

(iii) It stipulates that if the State of Qatar decides to repatriate Indian workers prematurely before the expiry of their contracted period, the Government of Qatar will ensure that before their repatriation full wages and other entitlements accruing to them under the contract of employment and the labour laws of the State of Qatar are paid to them for the entire un-availed period of the contract;

(iv) There is specific provision for the welfare of Indian workers in the unorganized sector;

(v) It provides for appropriate steps to be taken to curb practices detrimental to the welfare of the Indian workers working in or seeking work in the State of Qatar.

MoUs are being finalized with Malaysia and Oman. MoUs are also being pursued with Bahrain and Yemen. Further, to supplement the Agreement the Government of India had signed with the Government of Jordan in 1988, it is proposed to sign and Additional Protocol to the 1988 Agreement with Jordan addressing current issues.

Inclusion of Shimla-Chirgaon and Rampur-Rohru roads into the category of National Highways

*318. SHRI BASHISTHA NARAIN SINGH: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has received a representation forwarded by Prime Minister's Office in the month of August, 2007 regarding inclusion of Shimla-Chirgaon and Rampur-Rohru roads into National Highways;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) whether Government would include these roads during the Eleventh Five year Plan